

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ADANA 000205

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

NOT FOR INTERNET DISTRO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ELTN](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#) [TU](#) [ADANA](#)

SUBJECT: HABUR GATE CLOGGED BY CONSTRUCTION IN NEAR-TERM

REF: BAGHAD 4484

1.(SBU) Summary: AMCON Adana conoffs visited the Habur gate on November 9, attending the weekly border meeting, discussing issues in side meetings with U.S. logistics officials and SOMO representatives and surveying the new Sirnak province vehicle staging yard. The gate's operations were seen to be diminished by ongoing demolition and construction operations, which are part of the TOBB Chambers of Commerce-linked renovation project.

Discussion at the weekly meeting was stilted, but did feature a general acknowledgement by the Turkish MFA representative hosting the meeting that fuel issues were a central issue for Iraq in the coming months. Turkish trucker groups also demanded "an end to prejudicial practices which give priority to coalition cargo and SOMO trucks." Turkish officials, in sidebar discussions, noted continuing GoT sensitivity about fuel smuggling within and into Turkey. End Summary:

Weekly Meeting pro forma...

2.(SBU) Discussion at the weekly meeting was stilted. Both Iraqi customs officials and the SOMO representative stressed that energy issues were a central concern for Iraq in the coming months and called on Turkey to do all it could to assist Iraqi reconstruction through speedy provision of energy resources. The SOMO representative noted that Iraq also needed more Turkish electrical power, eliciting a Turkish reply that Sirnak province itself, where the Habur gate is situated, is short of electrical power and that work on the gate renovation project has been slowed by the need to rely on old, under-capacity generators part of each work day. Nevertheless, this Turkish-Iraqi exchange eventually yielded a general oral reflection by the Turkish MFA representative, who noted his own lack of authority to take a formal position, that fuel issues were a central issue for Iraq in the coming months. The MFA representative also said that he "informally would like to say that SOMO's payment of its bills might assist the situation." Still, he said that his door was "open anytime to Iraqi customs officials with specific proposals to discuss."

...Except for Turkish Trucker complaints

3.(SBU) Turkish trucker groups also demanded "an end to prejudicial practices which give priority to coalition cargo and SOMO trucks." Specifically, they complained that northbound coalition non-fuel cargo trucks should not be given "preferential treatment to re-enter Turkey." "They have no refrigerated cargo or special materials in them coming back. They can wait like everyone else," he said, "and all those tanker probably don't need to go to the front of the line." Upon some counter commentary by several Iraqi officials, he seemed to distance himself from including coalition tankers in his demands. (Comment: Turkish officials later said that they have to "deal with trucker group demands," but would not be driven by them on pressing "real coalition needs." Nevertheless, it seemed that they did not mind the trucker group statements since they were illustrative of the other factors at work at the gate beyond Iraqi and Coalition fuel concerns. End Comment.). Turkish officials, in sidebar discussions, also noted continuing GoT sensitivity about fuel smuggling into Iraq. They also said that unnamed Turkish security officials were concerned about a "lack of central authority" and a "power vacuum," explaining why security screening northbound had been increased in the last week. Without being too laudatory, they also expressed contentment with corresponding Iraqi security pre-screening.

SOMO explains its attempts to diversify northern route fuel sources

4.(SBU) The SOMO representative also announced that SOMO and TPIC, the Turkish State Petroleum Company, had signed a deal on or about Nov. 8 for construction of a small pipeline near the Habur Gate. He said that the pipeline's initial capacity would amount to about 60 tankers a day of current Habur gate transit traffic (out of a daily SOMO-desired 1,000 transits a day), but could grow in capacity to a possible 100-120 tanker-a-day equivalent "in the future." He said that construction of the pipeline from a TPIC existing spur line to the Turkish-Iraqi

border already was almost complete. (Comment: U.S. military sources knowledgeable of the pipeline said it was a good start, but far too small a capacity to affect civilian fuel supply shortages. They also said that any growth in its initial capacity was many months to over a year distant. End Comment.) Iraqi border officials were silent on when the matching receiving pipeline would be ready, but the SOMO official said it was "an important project for (SOMO) to complete." The SOMO representative also recalled to the group that Iraq had opened its al-Hrabiyah border gate with Syria for fuel transits, but that its capacity was limited to about a maximum of a hundred tankers a day. Turkish officials observed that Turkish truckers had used that gate briefly before and there were too many security problems in the area near Tal Afar for it to be a sustainable answer. The SOMO representative said that a new Iraqi military or police unit provided security now and that the al-Hrabiyah gate was closed to Turkish drivers. Still, he agreed that the gate's capacity was limited. Both Iraqi customs officials and the SOMO representative also agreed that the rail spur from Turkey (at Nusaybin) to Iraq through Syria was too costly and ill maintained for weighty fuel and cement loads, but was being used now for some limited delivery of food and light cargo.

SOMO sidebar

5.(SBU) AMCON Adana conoffs spoke with the SOMO representative on the margin of the meetings to pass on observations that few SOMO-related tankers had been observed moving toward the Habur gate Nov. 7-9. Asked about the Turkish MFA representative's observation on the catalyst additional payments to SOMO might make, the SOMO representative said that the Iraqi Finance Ministry insisted that it did not have the remaining USD 350 million that SOMO thought it still owed. He said he would pass on the Turkish comments and that SOMO probably would ask the Coalition to pay its fuel debt.

New Staging Yard could help, but not a panacea

6.(SBU) AMCON Adana conoffs then surveyed the new Sirnak province vehicle staging yard which is claimed to have a 5,000 vehicle marshalling capacity. It lies directly outside the entrance to the Habur Gate customs control area and is enclosed by a concrete and block wall with occasional (unmanned) watch towers. A restaurant, bathroom complex, showers, and small mosque were under construction. We were told that there were 3,000 vehicles in the yard, which reportedly opened on or about Nov. 7. We spot counted about 350 tankers in a corner of the yard, suggesting that the overall 3,000 count seemed roughly credible. Vehicles were divided into tanker and non-tankers and it appeared there was a de facto policy to park LNG/LPG tankers outside the facility. It is staffed by twenty province employees from random province departments and is charging five YTL (or about USD3.50) for each stay. Overall, it creates a staging capability which did not exist before which may facilitate tracking coalition cargo. Its chief drawbacks appeared to be its dirt and stone parking bed, which could well turn to mud as soon as winter rains arrive, and inexperienced staff who never had worked with traffic or cargo before the prior week. Several police were directing traffic near its entrance when we arrived, but there were no police or staff directing traffic inside. Nor were there any outside when we left a half hour later. (Comment: Local staff at the yard plainly said that the province had built the yard as a money maker perceiving that the province, despite bearing traffic and road costs, was making no revenue from transiting cargo without such a method to get involved in gate-related revenue collection. End Comment.)

TOBB pleased with progress, but sees extension necessary

7.(SBU) Conoffs met later with the Sirnak TOBB representative, who expressed pleasure at the pace of demolition and initial construction at the gate site so far. Nevertheless, he said that some materials scheduling delays, additional GoT small projects and poor power provisions were slowing progress. He suggested that TOBB soon would request a four-month extension to the project, which currently is set to conclude in June, 2006. He also confirmed that expanding gate capacity was not an aim of the renovation project. Instead its focus is modernizing the gate's automated systems, replacing its processing lanes and parking aprons, and re-surfacing its two bridges.

Comment

8 (SBU) The poor physical state of the gate was striking. We found it remarkable that the gate was managing to operate at all given widespread demolition, scattered piles of construction material on customs aprons, widespread debris fields, and seemingly endless snaking internal movement of vehicles. Discussion of boosting its capacity until much more of the renovation project is completed is not likely to be fruitful.

End Comment.
REID